

Katy Clark MSP submission of 14 September 2023

PE2029/C: Nationalise Clydeport to bring the ports and harbours on the river Clyde into public ownership

I am writing in support of petition PE2029. I regret I am unable to attend the meeting on 20 September 2023 as I will be at a funeral.

I have previously engaged with Mr Buirds and the Campaign to Save Inchgreen Dry Dock on this issue. I however came to this issue initially through engagement constituents in North Ayrshire about issues relating to the management of ports and harbours and decisions impacted by their private ownership, particularly in Ardrossan and at Hunterston. Despite the Scottish Government's own submission to the committee stating that "instances of complaints about ports in Scotland are rare", I am aware that grievances have been raised about Clydeport by community councils, trade unions, local campaigners, environmental groups, elected representatives and even Scottish Government ministers about its business practices and management of key assets over many years. In particular, North Ayrshire Council have repeatedly and justifiably raised concerns in relation to Ardrossan Harbour. I have seen the lack of control by government at all levels of these strategic assets impact negatively.

To give some background, as an MSP representing West Scotland since 2021, and as a former MP for North Ayrshire & Arran (2005 to 2015), I have had a longstanding interest in Clydeport/Peel and the extent to which their operations and practices impact on economic development and regeneration, or lack thereof, and on communities. As is set out in the SPICe briefing provided to the committee, Clydeport was only privatised in 1992. Prior to that, the Clyde Port Authority was a trust port without private shareholders or opaque ownership structures. The model adopted in the UK is very unusual. In other countries, it remains standard for either trusts or municipal authorities to own major ports or networks of ports. Some major ports like Amsterdam and Rotterdam are owned partly by the state and partly by the cities themselves. This is unsurprising given the strategic importance of ports as national assets,

whether it be for the purposes of passenger travel, leisure, trade or naval force.

That is not the case with Clydeport, owned by a private firm which is also the harbour authority for 450 square miles along the River Clyde. This is a significant level of control and influence considering the Clyde's historic significance and industrial heritage. Along with Inchgreen Dry Dock, the UK's largest dry dock, assets in the West Scotland Region include Hunterston PARC, Scotland's largest deepwater port, and Ardrossan Harbour, where CalMac operates the Brodick ferry route, the busiest on the entire network, as well as historically significant land in Inverclyde. However, further assets are owned in other parts of Scotland, for example in Glasgow, and down south such as Merseyside. The multinational owner Peel has a reputation for land banking and taking decisions which benefit only some of their sites.

I became aware of concerns regarding Peel's operation relating to development in Ardrossan from 2005. Since then, further concerns have been raised with me such as the refusal to dredge the river beyond Braehead and alleged misuse of key facilities. In Ardrossan, it took six years for grant terms to be agreed for the overdue redevelopment of the harbour proposed by North Ayrshire Council. Equally, where there have been limited developments, residents have expressed discontent at anchorages being placed too close to residential areas and a failure to meaningfully engage with local communities about proposals. I have repeatedly been lobbied, for example, about the Hunterston site. This site is immediately adjacent to Southannan Sands, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) comprised of three distinct areas stretching from Fairlie in the North to Hunterston in the south. Scottish National Heritage identify "highly productive ecosystems", "nationally scarce" species and "priority habitats". Despite this, many key proposals – such as shipping wind turbine blades over 100 metres long via the main jetty for the purposes of a new cable factory – have not been subject to environmental impact assessments.

Health and safety issues at the site have also been raised. The Maritime Investigation Branch refused to commit to an investigation after two drill ships broke their moorings during a period of severe weather in February 2021. It was later revealed Peel Ports had been informed of the potential safety issues of having the two vessels berthed off the coast two weeks prior to the incident. The formal report by the Republic

of the Marshall Islands Marine Accident Investigation Branch recommended all high windage vessels mooring at Hunterston must have anchors deployed at all times. This was ignored by Clydeport when a large FPSO vessel – Petrojarl Foinaven – was moored at the Hunterston jetty for a three month period in serious and significant breach of the aforementioned recommendation and the Petroleum Act 1998. Clydeport has previously admitted to safety breaches for which they were fined £650,000 in 2014. This included the deaths of crew members on a cargo vessel in 2007.

When I have previously broached these issues with the Scottish Government, it is notable that few of these points were disputed. When I raised Ardrossan Harbour delays with former Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth, she acknowledged that the private ownership of harbours “can substantially slow progress in relation to improvements and it also comes at a cost to the public purse”. This confirms the experiences of communities in the West of Scotland over decades. As the Scottish Government’s submission notes: “Scottish Ministers have powers to compulsorily acquire land under planning legislation... where the acquisition is ‘necessary for the public service’ or for planning or development purposes.”

I believe to realise any kind of meaningful industrial strategy, the Scottish Government must consider changing its position and meaningfully engage with the points raised in this petition. I therefore believe that the issues being raised in this petition need further consideration and exploration.